

# **The Montgomery Bus Boycott**

A Readers Theater script

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**\*\*\* The Montgomery City Code \*\*\***

**Male:** [*Singing*] Oh the

**ALL:** [*Singing*] driver of the bus says move on back, move on back, move on back. The driver of the bus says move on back.

**Parks:** NO! (pause) No more!

**Narrator 1 :** It had happened countless times before. A black person aboard a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus had been ordered by a white bus driver to surrender his or her seat to a white passenger.

**Narrator 2 :** Montgomery City Code (Section 10 – Separation of races – Required). Every person operating a bus line in the city shall provide equal but separate accommodations for white people and Negroes on his buses, by requiring the employees...to assign passengers seats on the vehicles under their charge in such a manner as to separate the white people from the Negroes.

**Narrator 3 :** The way it actually worked was this. The front four rows were reserved for whites and remained empty even when there were not enough white passengers to fill them.

**Narrator 4 :** The back section was for black passengers.

**Narrator 3 :** In between were some rows that were really part of the black section, but served as an overflow area for white passengers.

**Narrator 4** : If the white section was full, black passengers in the middle section had to vacate their seats – a whole row had to be vacated, even if only one white passenger required a seat.

**Narrator 1** : For the most part, blacks obeyed this order without visible resistance. To behave in any other manner meant probable arrest and possible violence.

**Narrator 2** : However, resistance to this order was building and the idea of a bus boycott was moving closer to a reality.

[Pause]

**Narrator 3** : Before we go any further, we want to make sure you know about two important groups that were already active in Montgomery at this time – the N-double A-C-P and the W-P-C.

**Narrator 1** : The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or N-double A-C-P was begun in 1909 to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.

**Narrator 4** : The Women’s Political Council or W-P-C was a Montgomery civic group composed of black women professionals led by JoAnn Robinson.

**Narrator 2** : N-double A-C-P branch president, E. D. Nixon and the W-P-C had previously contemplated a boycott and were looking for a court case that might successfully challenge public transportation segregation when 15-year-old Claudette Colvin was arrested.

**\*\*\* The Almost Case of Claudette Colvin \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1955, a handful of white people sought to board a city bus as it chugged up Dexter Avenue to the Court Street stop.

**Narrator 2** : The white bus driver looked back into the bus and saw that there were not enough seats on the bus for the white people to sit down. In the no-man's-land section of the bus were seated a number of African-Americans.

**Narrator 3** : The driver pointed back and said,

**Driver:** Give me those seats.

**Narrator 4** : One woman refused to move, even after police came and told her that they were going to arrest her.

**Narrator 3** : Her name was Claudette Colvin.

**Narrator 1** : She was a high school student.

**Narrator 2** : Police reports of the incident claimed that Colvin was dragged "kicking and clawing" off the bus.

**Narrator 1** : Colvin's arrest seemed to arouse the Negro community and there was talk of boycotting the buses in protest.

**Narrator 3** : She was charged with violating the segregation law, assault, and disorderly conduct. There was a good chance that she was going to go to jail rather than finish high school. All of this for refusing to give up her seat on the bus for a white person.

**Narrator 4** : The judge in this case was very smart though. He didn't convict Colvin on the segregation charge, only the assault one. This meant that there would not be a case that could go to the Supreme Court.

**Narrator 3** : The judge knew that Colvin's attorney would appeal a segregation case, so he convicted her on a charge that would be difficult to appeal.

**Narrator 2** : He also sentenced Colvin with only a small fine.

**Narrator 1** : This was enough to prove she was wrong, but would make it difficult for the African-American community to claim massive wrong.

**Narrator 4** : E.D. Nixon decided not to pursue the case, largely because Colvin's assault-and-battery charge and her out-of-wedlock pregnancy made her an inappropriate symbol for protest.

**Parks**: When E.D. Nixon discovered that Colvin was pregnant, that was the end of that case. The white press would have a field day with that information. They'd call her a bad girl, and her case wouldn't have a chance.

**Narrator 1** : Colvin's supposedly violent behavior at the time of her arrest disqualified her from representing the middle-class notions of womanly propriety that were so important to proving to the nation that African Americans were worthy of full citizenship.

**\*\*\* The Almost Case of Mary Louise Smith \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Mary Louise Smith, an eighteen-year-old African-American woman, was arrested on a bus in October, 1955.

**Parks**: Ms. Smith's prompt payment of the fine is the reason that her case wasn't a good one for Mr. Nixon to appeal to a higher court.

**Nixon**: Smith's obviously lower-class background also disqualified her as a suitable symbol for protest. When I went to Ms. Smith's house, I found her daddy in front of his shack, barefoot, drunk. Always drunk. [*Ms. Robinson clears her throat*] Yes, Ms. Robinson? What does the Women's Political Council have to say?

**Robinson**: Mr. Nixon, Ms. Smith's shortcomings are irrelevant to the principles of the case. We should press on with a protest.

**Nixon**: Ms. Robinson, I know how determined the W-P-C is to launch a protest, but a protest with Ms. Smith as the focus wouldn't have a leg to stand on.

**Narrator 2** : [Pause] But the next time was different.

**Nixon**: That's right!

**Narrator 2** : A well-respected black woman passenger refused to give up her seat and was arrested. This act led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and signaled the start of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

**Narrator 1** : The dignified, but demure-looking black woman whose arrest sparked the boycott, did not intend to stage a one-woman sit-in on a Montgomery bus. But Rosa Parks' background and character prepared her to do just that.

**\*\*\* Parks' Preparation \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Rosa Louise McCauley Parks was born in Tuskegee, Alabama on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1913. As a child growing up in Pine Level, Alabama, she had been taught by her maternal grandfather to never accept injustice without protest.

**Parks:** One of my most lasting and poignant childhood memories was of sitting up all night with my grandfather as he armed himself to protect his home and family from the Ku Klux Klan.

**Narrator 2** : Parks carried this example of resistance to racism with her when she moved to Montgomery years later. She attended Alabama State College, now known as

**ALL:** Alabama State University

**Narrator 2:** and made her living as a seamstress.

**Narrator 3** : In 1943 she joined the local branch of the N-double A-C-P.

**Narrator 4** : Parks served as its secretary for 13 years where she worked closely with branch president, E. D. Nixon.

**Narrator 5** : Nixon was likely the most militant African American in Montgomery. Not only was he president of the local N-double A-C-P; he was also the head of the local affiliate of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. As leader of both groups, Nixon led black Montgomerians in an attack of various forms of racial inequities.

**Narrator 6** : Nixon's willingness to confront segregation, racial discrimination and anti-black violence in Montgomery emboldened Parks in her conviction that blacks should resist unfair treatment.

**Narrator 1** : She was also inspired by the words of a young preacher named Martin Luther King.

**\*\*\* King's Inspiration \*\*\***

**King:** You know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. [*Thundering applause*] There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation – where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. (*Keep talking*) There comes a time. (*Yes sir, Teach*) [*Applause continues*]

We are here this evening because we're tired now. (*Yes*) [*Applause*] And I want to say, that we are not here advocating violence. (*No*) I want it to be known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation that we are Christian people. (*Yes*) [*Applause*] We believe in the Christian religion. We believe in the teachings of Jesus. (*Well*) The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. (*Yes*) [*Applause*]

And we are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. (*Well*) If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. (*Yes sir*) [*Applause*] If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. (*Yes*) [*Applause*] If we are wrong, justice is a lie: (*Yes*) and love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work, and fight, until justice runs down like water (*Yes*) [*Applause*] and righteousness like a mighty stream. (*Keep talkin'*) [*Applause*]

But I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love. Love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice. (*All right*) Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love. (*Well*)

As we prepare ourselves for what lies ahead, let us go with a grim and bold determination that we are going to stick together. [*Applause*] We are going to work together. [*Applause*] Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future, (*Yes*) somebody will have to say, "There lived a race of people, (*Well*) a black people, (*Yes*) a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. [*Applause*] And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization." And we're gonna do that. God grant that we will do it before it is too late. (*Oh yeah*) [*Applause*]

[Pause]

**\*\*\* Parks' prior protests \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Rosa Parks and other blacks in the city were disturbed about separate seating on city buses. Parks' job as a seamstress at the downtown Montgomery Fair Store, required that she ride the bus on a regular basis. But she never accepted segregated conditions imposed upon blacks who rode the buses.

**Narrator 2** : In 1955 forty-two year old Rosa Parks had taken to protesting segregation in her own quiet way.

**Narrator 3** : Rather than ride an elevator designated for "blacks only," she would routinely take the stairs.

**Narrator 4** : Parks also worked with the Montgomery Voters League. The Voters League was a group designed to help blacks pass the various tests that had been set up to make it difficult for them to register as voters.

**Narrator 5** : Parks often avoided traveling by bus, preferring to walk home from work when she was not too tired to do so.

**Narrator 3** : For these and other similar actions she gained a level of respect in the black community.

**Narrator 1** : The law also called for blacks to pay their fare at the front of the bus but to board the vehicle from the rear. White bus drivers often pulled from a bus stop before a black passenger could board from the back door.

**Narrator 5** : At other times, drivers drove off as blacks boarded the bus, leaving them caught in the back doorway.

**Narrator 4** : But even worse was the insulting treatment African Americans received from white bus drivers; they were frequently cursed and called names.

**Narrator 2** : Protesting this kind of treatment could result in violence, as it did for a black soldier who was killed by a bus driver in the early 1950's. Parks herself had been thrown off a city bus in 1943 in a dispute with a white bus driver.

**\*\*\* Parks refuses to move \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Initiating a protest against these conditions was not on Parks' mind as she stepped aboard a municipal bus on Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955.

**Narrator 2** : She had finished her day's work at the Montgomery Fair Store and had boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus as she headed to her home in Cleveland Court. Because the bus was crowded she sat in the middle section. At the third stop, at the Empire Theater, a white male patron boarded the bus and was left standing.

**Parks**: My decision to remain seated was not based on physical fatigue although I was tired and I didn't feel like standing for the rest of the journey. My action was the result of long years of anger and frustration over the treatment blacks received under Montgomery's segregationist laws and customs. I was simply tired of blacks being pushed around.

**Narrator 3** : So she quietly [refused to move].

**Parks:** I [refused to move]. I was determined to let it be known that we as a people, and I as an individual, had suffered that kind of humiliation far too long.

**Narrator 2 :** At this, the white bus driver threatened to call the police unless Parks gave up her seat.

**Parks:** (calmly) Go ahead and call them.

**Narrator 3 :** By the time the police arrived, the bus driver was very angry,

**Police:** Whatta yuh wanna do? Yuh want me tuh give her a warnin' or have her arrested?

**Bus Driver:** Arrest 'er!

**Narrator 1 :** Parks' arrest set in motion an event that local civil rights organizations and civic groups had been planning for years. The W-P-C had considered a boycott of the city's buses well before Parks' arrest.

**\*\*\* Prior protest plans \*\*\***

**Narrator 1 :** While boycott leaders insisted that the boycott was spontaneous, E. D. Nixon had [been]

**Nixon:** I'd [been] watching for at least a year for the proper persons or incident around which a protest could be built.

**Narrator 1** : And Montgomery's black women's organizations met with City Commissioners on numerous occasions to protest bus conditions. Jo Ann Robinson of the W-P-C claimed that...

**Robinson**: My organization had been waiting since 1949 to stage a boycott -- when the time was ripe and the people were ready.

**Narrator 1** : Following meetings in late 1953, a letter from Robinson reminded Mayor Gayle that

**Robinson**: Three-fourths of the riders of these public conveyances are Negroes. If Negroes did not patronize the bus system, then it could not possibly operate. Twenty-five or more local organizations have talked of boycotting the Montgomery City Lines.

**\*\*\* Sexual anxieties \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : The "proper persons or incident" for which E.D. Nixon had been waiting included one specific qualification: the arrested party must be a woman. White racism in the South often focused on sexual anxieties claiming that integration would lead to intermarriage and the fall of American civilization. In the words of Theodore Bilbo, a U.S. Democratic Senator from Mississippi:

**Bilbo** : If the blood of our white race should become corrupted and mingled with the blood of Africa, then the present greatness of the United States of America would be destroyed and all hope for the future would be forever gone.

**Narrator 2** : Montgomery Police Commissioner Clyde Sellers called Negroes

**Sellers:** Animals! They're animals who are after white women to marry them.

**Narrator 1** : Sexual fears loomed large in the struggle over desegregation of public transportation. Boycott leaders confronted the Montgomery City Lines with the fact that numerous other Alabama cities utilized a "first-come, first-served" plan. When they demanded that a similar plan be implemented, Montgomery City Lines attorney Jack Crenshaw insisted

**Crenshaw:** A "first-come, first-served" plan will not work in Montgomery. Other cities have clearly-delineated racial sections that naturally keep buses segregated. But Montgomery's more dispersed neighborhoods result in significant racial mixtures on most bus routes. Because of the angles of the bus seats, white nurses getting on a bus just leaving a Negro section of town would be rubbing knees with Negro men. It just won't work.

**Parks:** The best plaintiff would be a woman because a woman would get more sympathy than a man. And the woman would have to be above reproach, have a good reputation, and have done nothing wrong but refuse to give up her seat.

**Narrator 2** : What the W-P-C and black leaders like E. D. Nixon needed was a black passenger whose arrest would engender a city-wide boycott of Montgomery's buses. Parks' image in the black community and her convictions regarding racial injustice made her a person upon whom they believed they could base their protest.

**\*\*\* Parks, the perfect symbol \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : E.D. Nixon's actions in the Colvin and Smith cases illustrate the importance he and other boycott leaders placed on favorable public opinion.

**Nixon:** You got to think about newspapers. You got to think about public opinion. You got to think policies and so forth, and intimidation.

**Narrator 2** : The movement's symbol, then, had to rally both Montgomery's large working-class black population AND stand up to national scrutiny.

**Parks:** The white people couldn't point to me and say that there was anything I had done to deserve such treatment except to be born black.

**Narrator 3** : Parks' reputation was that of a good Christian and an upstanding citizen. Her respectability was largely a result of her embodiment of core middle-class values – chastity, family stability, and proper womanly demeanor.

**King:** Nobody can doubt the boundless outreach of her integrity. (*Sho'nough*) Nobody can doubt the height of her character, (*Yes*) nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment and devotion to the teachings of Jesus. (*All right*) Mrs. Parks is a fine Christian person, unassuming, and yet there is integrity and character there. And just because she refused to get up, she was arrested.

**Narrator 4** : So this respectable woman was taken to the police station where she was fingerprinted and jailed.



**Narrator 4** : That afternoon they formed an organization to spearhead the boycott movement. The new organization was called the Montgomery Improvement Association, the M-I-A. Twenty-five-year-old Martin Luther King Jr., was selected as the organization's president.

**Narrator 2** : King was chosen by the group because he was an intelligent, young black man

**Narrator 3** : he had earned his Ph.D. at Boston University,

**Narrator 2** : and because his position as a newcomer to the city

**Narrator 3** : he had just arrived in Montgomery the year before

**Narrator 2** : meant he had not yet formed personal enemies who might also become enemies of the boycott.

**Narrator 1** : Black ministers agreed to announce the boycott to their congregations that Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. Announcement of the boycott also appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Through these methods, nearly all in the black community were made aware of the protest plans.

**Narrator 5** : Parks' trial was held Monday morning. She plead not guilty, but she was convicted and fined 10 dollars and costs.

**Narrator 4** : Despite years of planning, local leaders were uncertain of the outcome of the one-day boycott. They were ecstatic when they observed Monday morning that the boycott was almost a total success.

**\*\*\* MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Meanwhile, a mass meeting of blacks in the city was scheduled for that evening at Holt Street Baptist Church.

**Narrator 2** : About 7 thousand gathered at the church for the purpose of determining the future course of the protest. Both the sanctuary and the basement auditorium were filled well before the proceedings began, and an audience outside listened via loudspeakers.

**Narrator 3** : In addition to reporters, photographers, and two television crews, black leaders from other Alabama cities such as Birmingham, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa were among those attending.

**Narrator 4** : Dr. Martin Luther King and the boycott's co-leader, First Baptist Church pastor Ralph D. Abernathy, set the tone of the meeting.

**Narrator 2** : The meeting opened with two hymns, a prayer, and a Scripture reading.

**ALL**: [*humming "Onward Christian Soldiers"*]

**King**: How can I make a speech that will be militant enough to keep my people aroused to positive action and yet moderate enough to keep this fervor within controllable and Christian bounds? What can I say to keep them courageous and prepared for positive action and yet devoid of hate and resentment? Can the militant and the moderate be combined in a single speech?

[*Humming ends*]

**Narrator 4** : King then delivered an address that he had quickly composed before the meeting.

**King:** My friends, we are certainly very happy to see each of you out this evening. We are here this evening for serious business. (*Yes*) We are here in a general sense because first and foremost we are American citizens (*That's right*) and we are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. (*Yeah, That's right*) We are here also because of our love for democracy, (*Yes*) because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action (*Yes*) is the greatest form of government on earth. (*That's right*)

But we are here in a specific sense, because of the bus situation in Montgomery. (*Yes*) We are here because we are to get the situation corrected. This situation is not at all new. For many years now Negroes in Montgomery and so many other areas have been inflicted with the paralysis of crippling fears (*Yes*) on buses in our community. (*That's right*)

I don't have time this evening to go into the history of these numerous cases. Many of them now are lost in the thick fog of oblivion, (*Yes*) but at least one stands before us now with glaring dimensions. (*Yes*) Just the other day, just last Thursday to be exact, one of the finest citizens in Montgomery (*Amen*) – not one of the finest Negro citizens (*That's right*) but one of the finest citizens in Montgomery – was taken from a bus (*Yes*) and carried to jail and arrested (*Yes*) because she refused to get up to give her seat to a white person. (*Yes, That's right*)

**Narrator 3** : The Reverend Edgar French of the Hilliard Chapel AME Zion Church introduced Rosa Parks. He also introduced Fred Daniel, a student at Alabama State College who had been arrested that morning on a disorderly conduct charge for allegedly preventing a black woman from getting on a bus. The charge was later dismissed. Reverend French.

**French:** It has already been pointed out to you that Mrs. Parks was ordered from her seat on the bus, a public conveyance for which she had paid the legal fare. (*Well*) [*Applause*] What difference does it make if it was the President of the United States that had gotten on the bus? Mrs. Parks is a lady, and any gentleman would allow a lady to have a seat. [*Applause*]

**King:** I think we are moving on with a great deal of enthusiasm this evening. We see that you are with this cause and you are with our struggle. It is a struggle for all of us, not just one, but all (*Yeah*) and we're gonna stick with it.

Now at this point, Reverend Abernathy, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Montgomery, will come and read the resolutions and recommendations.  
Reverend Abernathy.

**Abernathy:** Thank you, Dr. King. All of you who know me, know very well that I would love to make a speech now. [*Laughter, applause*] Whenever you start talking about freedom and start talking about justice, you know I have something to say about it. (*Well*) But I have been asked to read these resolutions. And I want [them] read...carefully...in order that you might understand them.

**\*\*\* Resolutions \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Whereas, there are thousands of Negroes in the city and county of Montgomery who ride buses owned and operated by the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated,

**Narrator 2** : Whereas, said citizens have been riding buses owned and operated by said company over a number of years,

**Narrator 3** : Whereas, said citizens, over a number of years, and on many occasions, have been insulted, embarrassed, (*Yeah*) and have been made to suffer great fear of bodily harm (*That's right*) by drivers of buses owned and operated by said bus company, (*Yeah*)

**Narrator 4** : Whereas, the drivers of said buses have never requested a white passenger riding on any of its buses to relinquish his seat and to stand so that a Negro may take his seat. [*Applause*] However, said drivers have on many occasions, too numerous to mention, requested Negro passengers on said buses to relinquish their seats and to stand so that white passengers may take their seats. [*Applause*]

**Narrator 5** : Whereas, said citizens of Montgomery city and county pay their fares just as all other persons who are passengers on said buses, (*All right*) and are entitled to fair and equal treatment, (*Yeah*) [*Applause*]

**Narrator 6** : Whereas, there has been any number of arrests of Negroes caused by drivers of said buses, and they are constantly put in jail for refusing to give white passengers their seats. (*All right*) [*Applause*]

**Narrator 3** : Whereas, the official of the bus line promised that he would issue a statement of policy clarifying the law with reference to the seating of Negro passengers on the buses,

**Narrator 4** : Whereas, the official of said bus lines did not make public the statement as to its policy with reference to the seating of passengers on its buses,

**Narrator 1** : Whereas, since that time, at least two ladies have been arrested for an alleged violation of the city segregation law with reference to bus travel,

**Narrator 5** : Whereas, said citizens of Montgomery city and county believe that they have been grossly mistreated as passengers on the buses owned and operated by said bus company (*All right*) in spite of the fact that they are in the majority with reference to the number of passengers riding the said buses. [*Applause*]

**Narrator 6** : In light of these observations, be it therefore resolved as follows: Number One. That the citizens of Montgomery are requesting that every citizen in Montgomery, regardless of race, color or creed, to refrain from riding buses owned and operated in the city of Montgomery by the Montgomery Lines, Incorporated, [*Applause*] until some arrangement has been worked out [*Applause*] between said citizens and the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated.

**Narrator 4** : Number Two. That every person owning or who has access to an automobile will use their automobiles in assisting other persons to get to work without charge. [*Applause*]

**Narrator 2** : Number Three. That the employers of persons whose employees live a great distance from them, as much as possible, afford transportation for your own employees. [*Applause*]

**King:** Be it further resolved, that we have not, we are not, and we have no intentions of using any unlawful means or any intimidation (*Go ahead*) to persuade persons not to ride the Montgomery City Lines buses. [*Applause*] However, we call upon your conscience, (*All right*) both moral and spiritual, to give your whole-hearted support (*That's right*) to this worthy undertaking. We believe we have a just complaint and we are willing to discuss this matter with the proper authorities. (*Yes*) [*Applause*] Thus ends the resolution. [*Applause*]

**Abernathy:** Dr. King, prayerfully, spiritually, sincerely, I wish to offer a motion. I move that this resolution shall be adopted.

**King:** I second the motion. It has been moved, it has been moved, and seconded, that these recommendations and these resolutions would be accepted and adopted by the citizens of Montgomery. Are you ready for the question? (*Thundering Yes*) All in favor, stand on your feet. [*Applause*] Opposers do likewise. [*Laughter*] Opposers do likewise. There is a prevailing majority. [*Applause*]

You have voted. And you have done it with a great deal of enthusiasm. Now let us stick together and stay with this thing until the end. [*Applause*] Now it means sacrificing, yes, it means sacrificing at points. But there are some things that we've got to learn to sacrifice for. (*Yeah*) And I've come to see now that as we struggle for our rights, maybe some will have to die. But somebody said, if a man doesn't have something that he'll die for, he isn't fit to live. [*Enthusiastic applause*]  
[Pause]

**\*\*\* The Boycott \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : Blacks were called upon to continue the protest and made three demands of the white bus company and city officials. The demands were (1) Courteous treatment on the buses; (2) First-come, first-served seating, with whites in the front and blacks in the back; and (3) Hiring black drivers for the black bus routes.

**Narrator 2** : For over a year, black Montgomerians carried out their pledge. As they had been urged, they walked to their jobs, homes, and to stores. Some even rode mules! The Montgomery Improvement Association, M-I-A, initially used black taxi cabs to transport others to their destinations.

**Narrator 3** : Later, when city officials forbade this practice, the M-I-A organized an intricate system of car pools. It established pick-up and drop-off points throughout the black community using church-operated station wagons known as “rolling churches”. The system enabled blacks to carry out their obligations without being forced to return to city buses.

**Narrator 1** : Let’s have Chicago alderman, Dorothy Tillman, tell about it. Ms. Tillman?

**Tillman:** My father had his cars picking up the elderly people, and we made up a song, ‘Boycott the bus ‘til they respect us!’

**ALL** [*Chant 3 times*]: Boycott the bus ‘til they respect us!

**Tillman:** Boycott the bus ‘til they respect... (*fading*)

[*All humming “We shall overcome”*]

**Narrator 2** : Meanwhile, white authorities refused to accept the MIA's demands. The organization then decided to use local black attorney, Fred Gray, to initiate a suit against the city's segregationist statute, charging that it violated the constitutional rights of blacks.

**Narrator 1** : Opposition by white authorities to the boycott was not limited to their refusal to accept the demands. They ordered an arrest of the boycott's leaders based on a city law which prohibited boycotts without a legal basis.

**Narrator 3** : When this tactic proved unsuccessful, local whites attempted to squash the movement through intimidation and violence. In late January 1956 the home of King was bombed and other boycott leaders received violent threats.

*[humming stops]*

**\*\*\* Midway \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : I've come this far to freedom and I won't turn back.  
I'm climbing to the highway from my old dirt track.

**Narrator 2** : I'm coming and I'm going  
And I'm stretching and I'm growing

**Narrator 3** : And I'll reap what I've been sowing or my skin's not black.

**Narrator 4** : I've prayed and slaved and waited and I've sung my song.  
You've bled me and...starved me but I've still grown strong.

**Narrator 5** : I've seen the daylight breaking high above the bough.  
I've found my destination and I've made my vow,

**Narrator 6** : So whether you...deride me or ignore me,  
Mighty mountains loom before me

**ALL:** and I won't stop now.

[Pause]

**Narrator 4** : In rain and cold and sleet and through the heat of summer,  
Montgomery's black people stayed off the buses.

**Narrator 2** : They shared rides, they worked out carpools, they walked. But  
they stayed off the buses.

**Narrator 5** : The jails were filled with people whose only crime was riding  
in a carpool. But they stayed off the buses.

**Narrator 6** : Houses were burned, churches were bombed, and shots were  
fired. But they stayed off the buses.

**Narrator 1** : What Montgomery's black citizens were doing was important,  
and they knew it.

**\*\*\* The Boycott Ends \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : The capacity of African-Americans to endure daily discomfort  
and physical threats was in many ways the result of the leadership of Dr.  
King.

**Narrator 2** : Blacks were urged to resist their enemies through love rather  
than hate and retaliation.

**Narrator 1** : Most black Montgomerians accepted King's nonviolent philosophy and this was in part responsible for the success of their protest.

**Narrator 3** : Another reason for the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott was the involvement of the entire black community in the effort.

**Narrator 4** : Their vigilance in the struggle for their legal rights was rewarded November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1956, when the United States Supreme Court upheld a federal district court decision affirming that segregation on city buses was unconstitutional.

**Narrator 5** : Blacks chose to maintain the boycott until December 20<sup>th</sup> when the court's official documents were served on the city and bus company officials forcing them to follow the Supreme Court's ruling.

**Narrator 2** : The following morning, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1956, Dr. King and Reverend Glen Smiley, a white minister, shared the front seat of a public bus in Montgomery.

**Narrator 1** : The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a 381-day protest by African Americans against segregation on city buses.

**Narrator 2** : Their actions demonstrated that a determined people, willing to risk personal safety and comfort confronted an unjust system.

**Narrator 3** : Eloise Greenfield in her book *Childtimes* writes: People are a part of their time. They are affected, during the time that they live, by the things that happen in their world. Big things and small things. A war, an invention, a birthday party, a kiss, {a bus ride}. All of these help to shape the present and the future.

[Pause]

**Narrator 4** : The Montgomery Bus Boycott was important because it caught the attention of the entire nation.

**Narrator 5** : People around the country were made aware of it because it was launched on such a massive scale and it lasted for more than a year.

**Narrator 1** : It set the tone for the whole civil rights movement.

**Narrator 3** : And the boycott gave Martin Luther King a position of leadership within the national movement and showed that the nonviolent method of protest was effective.

[Pause]

**Narrator 4** : Changing the world begins when you greet someone who doesn't expect to be greeted, or when you greet someone who is angry at you.

**Narrator 2** : It begins with your negotiating what could be a fight.

**Narrator 3** : It begins with your respect for someone that you disagree with.

**Narrator 5** : Changing the world begins when you realize that you are strong, and you deserve to be whatever you can be.

**\*\*\* The Birmingham Pledge \*\*\***

**Narrator 1** : If you want to change the world just a little bit more today, please rise and join me as I lead us in a public commitment or recommitment to civil rights. Please stand and join me in the *Birmingham Pledge*.

The words are printed in your program. Join with me now as we pledge aloud together.

**ALL** : I believe that every person has worth as an individual.

I believe that every person is entitled to dignity and respect, regardless of race or color.

I believe that every thought and every act of racial prejudice is harmful; if it is my thought or act, then it is harmful to me as well as to others.

Therefore, from this day forward I will strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from my thoughts and actions.

I will discourage racial prejudice by others at every opportunity.

I will treat all people with dignity and respect; and I will strive daily to honor this pledge, knowing that the world will be a better place because of my effort.

**Narrator 1** : Thank you. You may be seated. If you meant that, if you mean that, we invite you to go to the web address listed in your program and join us and the more than 95,000 people world-wide who have already signed this pledge.

[Pause]

**\*\*\* Final \*\*\***

**Narrator 4** : New problems may emerge; old ones come to the surface again, but the civil rights movement remains the nation's best example of profound, nonviolent social change. Is the civil rights movement over?

**Narrator 1** : Not really. I don't think it's completely over...

**Narrator 2** : Where inequality exists, we have work to do.

**Narrator 3** : Where disrespect remains, we have work to do.

**Narrator 4** : Where prejudice prevails, we have work to do.

**Narrator 1** : On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man.

**Narrator 2** : This simple act, which today would seem unremarkable, set in motion the civil rights movement, which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964

**Narrator 3** : and ultimately ensured that, today, all black Americans must be given equal treatment under the law.

**Narrator 4** : And America has been changed forever.

**ALL**: Changed! Forever!

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Sign the *Birmingham Pledge* online at <http://birminghampledge.org/English.asp>  
More than 102,000 people have signed the pledge so far.

